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ABSTRACT

In an effort to overcome organizational resistance to change, Victor Valley College, in Victorville, California, has utilized a seven-part strategy to enable leaders to empower others and effect change. Step 1 requires the development of a visionary plan, so that changes have a meaningful context. Step 2 calls for an assessment of the campus climate, including the distribution of a questionnaire to board members, faculty, and staff to determine their views on institutional strengths and weaknesses, an assessment of institutional leadership, and an evaluation of organizational structure. Step 3 involves the development of a personal leadership strategy, offering the following suggestions: (1) challenge the process by searching for opportunities, experimenting and taking risks; (2) inspire a shared vision by envisioning the future and enlisting the help of others; (3) enable others to act by fostering collaboration; (4) set an example and plan small successes; and (5) encourage the heart by recognizing individual contributions and celebrating accomplishments. Step 4 involves developing trust, which entails integrity, honesty, effective and timely communications, and consistency on the part of leaders. Step 5 which entails improving communications, suggests that both formal communication, such as weekly bulletins, as well as informal forms, such as managing by walking around the campus, will improve morale and keep people informed. Step 6 calls for the development and maintenance of an effective management team. Finally, step 7 suggests that developing a structure for change, such as Total Quality Management, is important for the on-going process of change at the institution. The survey instrument to assess institutional strengths and weaknesses is appended. (MAB)

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Effecting Change in a Resistant Organization

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JC 930 131

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EFFECTING CHANGE IN A RESISTANT ORGANIZATION

Ninety percent of all scientific knowledge has been generated in the last 30 years. By the year 2000 scientific knowledge will double again. And by the year 2010 our knowledge pool will double annually. Our governmental financial resource pool is declining. California Community Colleges are being asked to complete our mission and serve more students with fewer public fiscal resources. The tax-paying population is calling for greater efficiency in government--at the same time our society is asking for innovation in instructional methodology and curriculum. The Japanese have demonstrated that horizontal organizations and greater employee control of work processes leads to greater productivity and improved cost effectiveness. AB 1725 and the shared governance movement has dramatically effected how administration and boards interact with faculty, staff, and students.

Change is occurring around and in the institution called the community college. Are we ready for it? Do we want it? Do we know how to effect it? Is our leadership adequately prepared to lead us through it? An affirmative response should result in greater innovation, productivity, and allow us to be a leader in the academic and economic viability of our state and nation.

Yet, I am not sure our organizations are ready for change. The faculty, staff, and administration sometimes find security and satisfaction in adversarial relationships. Boards and administration seem reluctant to give up control and power. We seem to resist change in our institutions. Our organizations are

still hierarchical, our buildings continue to be designed for traditional uses, our relationship with faculty and staff are oftentimes strained, our teaching methodologies are often traditional, and our efficiency is sometimes questioned by the public.

It appears we need to change, and it's going to take effective leadership to effect change in our resistant organizations--not just leadership at the top but at all levels of the organization.

Tom Fryer and John Lovas in Leadership in Governance state, "We believe that institutions move toward the fullest achievement of their potential when they consciously grant their members power, creating the conditions under which more of their members want to do more for the institution." The remainder of this article will focus on a strategy for leaders to empower others and create necessary change.

Step 1: Have a visionary plan. You must have a reason to institute change. The reason should be captured in a strategic plan. Therefore, step one is to develop a plan for the future. Change for change sake is meaningless. But if you have a strategic plan, change becomes meaningful.

Step 2: Assessment. Know what needs to be changed. When I became the CEO of Victor Valley College the first action I took was to assess the climate of the campus. I sent a questionnaire to the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and classified staff to

determine what they saw as institutional strengths and weaknesses, hopes and dreams, and what they wanted from their new president. I discovered tension high, communications poor, and the self-concept of the institution low. It became obvious that the college needed an overhaul and it appeared that's what was wanted. Yet, I was soon to discover the college would resist the very change it appeared to want. A change strategy became a necessity.

The second step in assessment was to assess my style, my strengths and weaknesses. I needed to understand how others saw me. This was risky, but the information gleaned through an evaluation and a communications style survey was powerful. As a result I developed a self-change strategy and began implementing it through reading, workshops, and lots of practice. I continue to improve today. No, I don't think I was a poor leader, in fact I thought I was pretty good. Yet, I've adopted the motto, "I'm outstanding, but I'll get better."

The third part of assessment is to evaluate your organizational structure. Does the structure foster or fight change? If barriers to change occur in the organization, risk organizational change. This, too, is difficult. To accomplish it win the support of others through education, information, and a positive alternative developed with the input from others.

Step 3: Develop a personal leadership strategy. You can read about the leadership skills needed today in a number of very fine texts. James Kouznes and Barry Posner summarize these skills best in the following way:

Challenge the process

1. Search for opportunities
2. Experiment and take risks

Inspire a Shared Vision

3. Envision the future
4. Enlist others

Enable Others to Act

5. Foster collaboration
6. Strengthen others

Model the Way

7. Set the example
8. Plan small wins

Encourage the Heart

9. Recognize individual contribution
10. Celebrate accomplishments

Develop a plan for yourself as a leader. And remember followers expect their leaders to be honest, competent, forward looking, and inspiring.

Step 4: Develop Trust. This step takes time and patience. People are not simply going to trust you because you ask them; you have to "win" their trust. Integrity, honesty, effective and timely communications, and consistency are the ingredients needed to win trust. If you possess these skills the rest will take care of itself.

Step 5: Improve Communications. Our hierarchical structure, and our personal styles often interfere with communications.

Because we are aware of all the "great things" we are doing, somehow we expect others to know by "osmosis" what is being accomplished in our organizations. Don't assume others know what's going on in your organization. Improve both your formal and informal communications. Insist on effective communications throughout the organization. Weekly bulletins summarizing what is going on and who is accomplishing what will improve morale and keep people informed. Get out of the office and talk to people. Managing by walking around has benefits. It keeps you informed and it informs others.

Know where effective communications is being eroded in your organization. At Victor Valley College we studied the campus communications patterns by assessing our communications strengths and weaknesses. We found blocks throughout the organization. We found room for improvement in the president's style; communications skills and patterns of vice-presidents, deans and directors; and in the separation of roles of the Faculty Senate and the faculty bargaining unit. We are now embarking on a plan to eradicate these blocks to effective communications.

Step 6: Develop an Effective Team. You won't be able to make the organization change by yourself. The team around you are key players in effecting change. You need to educate them to your vision, goals, management style, and expectations. Team members need to know what you expect from them and in turn you need to be open to what they expect from you. Once you develop an effective team, constantly strive to strengthen it.

Step 7: Develop a structure for change. The last Network had an article on Total Quality Management. TQM is a great structure in which to accomplish organizational change. We oftentimes rely too much on the management style of the leader, or the philosophy of participative or shared governance to produce change. It is much better if we have a tool in which change and improvement can be part of the on-going process of the institution. TQM is a structure that will effect constant organizational change.

At Victor Valley College we are in the midst of effecting change so that we can provide quality educational programs and services to our students of today and in the future. The path has not always been straight. We never expected it to be. The direction, on the other hand, is positive and this writer is confident that the future for VVC is bright. We are applying these steps and find them useful, perhaps they will work for you.

August 1990
College-Wide Survey

1. What are the most important issues and problems facing Victor Valley College currently?

2. What are the important opportunities facing Victor Valley College now and in the future?

3. What, if anything, at Victor Valley College prevents you from being most effective in your efforts to teach and/or serve students?

4. What works really well at Victor Valley College?

5. What bothers you the most about Victor Valley College?

6. If you were the superintendent/president, what three items would you place in your immediate plan of action?